





*Summary*  
*Whittier, John Greenleaf*

### THE ANTISLAVERY CONVENTION OF 1833.

IN the gray twilight of a chill day of late November, forty years ago, a dear friend of mine residing in Boston made his appearance at the old farm-house in East Haverhill. He had been deputed by the abolitionists of the city, William L. Garrison, Samuel E. Sewall, and others, to inform me of my appointment as a delegate to the Convention about to be held in Philadelphia for the formation of an American Antislavery Society; and to urge upon me the necessity of my attendance.

Few words of persuasion, however, were needed. I was unused to traveling; my life had been spent on a secluded farm; and the journey, mostly by stage-coach, at that time was really a formidable one. Moreover, the few abolitionists were everywhere spoken against, their persons threatened, and in some instances a price set on their heads by Southern legislators. Pennsylvania was on the borders of Slavery, and it needed small effort of imagination to picture to one's self the breaking up of the Convention and maltreatment of its members. This latter consideration I do not think weighed much with me, although I was better prepared for serious danger than for anything like personal indignity. I had read Governor Trumbull's description of the tarring and feathering of his hero MacFingal, when, after the application of the melted tar, the feather-bed was ripped open and shaken over him, until

"Not Maia's son, with wings for ears,  
 Such plumes about his visage wears,  
 Nor Milton's six-winged angel gathers  
 Such superfluity of feathers,"

and I confess I was quite unwilling to undergo a martyrdom which my best friends could scarcely refrain from laughing at. But a summons like that of Garrison's bugle-blast could scarcely be unheeded by one who, from birth and education, held fast the traditions of

that earlier abolitionism which, under the lead of Benezet and Woolman, had effaced from the Society of Friends every vestige of slave-holding. I had thrown myself, with a young man's fervid enthusiasm, into a movement which commended itself to my reason and conscience, to my love of country, and my sense of duty to God and my fellow-men. My first venture in authorship was the publication, at my own expense, in the spring of 1833, of a pamphlet entitled, "Justice and Expediency;" on the moral and political evils of slavery, and the duty of emancipation. Under such circumstances I could not hesitate, but prepared at once for my journey. It was necessary that I should start on the morrow, and the intervening time, with a small allowance for sleep, was spent in providing for the care of the farm and homestead during my absence.

So the next morning I took the stage for Boston, stopping at the ancient hostelry known as the Eastern Stage Tavern; and on the day following, in company with William Lloyd Garrison, I left for New York. At that city we were joined by other delegates, among them David Thurston, a Congregational minister from Maine. On our way to Philadelphia we took, as a matter of necessary economy, a second-class conveyance, and found ourselves, in consequence, among rough and hilarious companions, whose language was more noteworthy for strength than refinement. Our worthy friend the clergyman bore it awhile in painful silence, but at last felt it his duty to utter words of remonstrance and admonition. The leader of the young roisterers listened with a ludicrous mock gravity, thanked him for his exhortation, and expressing fears that the extraordinary effort had exhausted his strength, invited him to take a drink with him. Father Thurston buried his grieved face in his cloak-

NOONING IN FLORIDA.

THE morning sun that opened up  
 Its disk of grand auroral flower,  
 As well as the tiny buttercup  
 And tamarind clocks that mark the hour,  
 Now sleeps through all the midday calm  
 In furrowed field and grassy meadow,  
 Or glimmers on the pine and palm  
 That stand foot deep in pools of shadow.

The lizard turns from green to mauve,  
 Expands his pouch, and bobs, and settles;  
 The water-lily's fingered glove  
 Half closes on its disk of petals;  
 The yellow goats-beard goes to sleep;  
 The aster nods; the salvia dozes;  
 The fuchsias wink, and try to keep  
 Awake, among the sleepy roses,

Till musing memory shifts the scene;  
 A drowsy shadow passes over:  
 I see the fields of Northern green,  
 And smell the musk of Northern clover.  
 Out of the orchards, drawing near,  
 I hear the tired axles creaking,  
 And I know the wheat is in the ear —  
 I hear the whetted scythe a-speaking.

So, summer dozes North and South  
 From frosty lake to southern champaign,  
 And greedy bees, about her mouth,  
 Suck honey all the harvest campaign:  
 While I lie here, in drowsy ease,  
 The languid airs about me swooning,  
 Lulled by the songs of hives of bees,  
 In beds of phlox and heart's-ease, nooning.

Will Wallace Harney.

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collar, and wisely left the young repro-bates to their own devices.

On reaching Philadelphia we at once betook ourselves to the humble dwelling on Fifth Street occupied by Evan Lewis, a plain, earnest man, and life-long abolitionist, who had been largely interested in preparing the way for the Convention. In one respect the time of our assembling seemed unfavorable. The Society of Friends, upon whose coöperation we had counted, had but recently been rent asunder by one of those unhappy controversies which so often mark the decline of practical righteousness. The martyr-age of the society had passed, wealth and luxury had taken the place of the old simplicity, there was a growing conformity to the maxims of the world in trade and fashion, and with it a corresponding unwillingness to hazard respectability by the advocacy of unpopular reforms. Unprofitable speculation and disputation on one hand, and a vain attempt on the other to enforce uniformity of opinion, had measurably lost sight of the fact that the end of the gospel is love, and that charity is its crowning virtue. After a long and painful struggle the disruption had taken place; the shattered fragments, under the name of Orthodox and Hicksite, so like and yet so separate in feeling, confronted each other as hostile sects, and

"Never either found another

To free the hollow heart from paining;  
They stood aloof, the scars remaining,  
Like cliffs that have been torn asunder  
A dreary sea now flows between;  
But neither rain nor frost nor thunder  
Can wholly do away, I ween,  
The marks of that which once has been."

We found about forty members assembled in the parlors of our friend Lewis, and, after some general conversation, Lewis Tappan was asked to preside over an informal meeting, preparatory to the opening of the Convention. A handsome, intellectual-looking man, in the prime of life, responded to the invitation, and in a clear, well-modulated voice, the firm tones of which inspired hope and confidence, stated the objects of our preliminary council,

and the purpose which had called us together, in earnest and well-chosen words. In making arrangements for the Convention, it was thought expedient to secure, if possible, the services of some citizen of Philadelphia of distinction and high social standing to preside over its deliberations. Looking round among ourselves in vain for some titled civilian or doctor of divinity, we were fain to confess that to outward seeming we were but "a feeble folk," sorely needing the shield of a popular name. A committee, of which I was a member, was appointed to go in search of a president of this description. We visited two prominent gentlemen, known as friendly to emancipation and of high social standing. They received us with the dignified courtesy of the old school, declined our proposition in civil terms, and bowed us out with a cool politeness equaled only by that of the senior Winkle towards the unlucky deputation of Pickwick and his unprepossessing companions. As we left their doors we could not refrain from smiling in each other's faces at the thought of the small inducement our proffer of the presidency held out to men of their class. Evidently our company was not one for Respectability to march through Coventry with.

On the following morning we repaired to the Adelphi Building on Fifth Street, below Walnut, which had been secured for our use. Sixty-two delegates were found to be in attendance. Beriah Green, of the Oneida (N. Y.) Institute, was chosen president, — a fresh-faced, sandy-haired, rather common-looking man, but who had the reputation of an able and eloquent speaker. He had already made himself known to us as a resolute and self-sacrificing abolitionist. Lewis Tappan and myself took our places at his side as secretaries, on the elevation at the west end of the hall.

Looking over the assembly, I noticed that it was mainly composed of comparatively young men, some in middle age, and a few beyond that period. They were nearly all plainly dressed, with a view to comfort rather than ele-

gance. Many of the faces turned towards me wore a look of expectancy and suppressed enthusiasm; all had the earnestness which might be expected of men engaged in an enterprise beset with difficulty and perhaps with peril. The fine, intellectual head of Garrison, prematurely bald, was conspicuous; the sunny-faced young man at his side, in whom all the beatitudes seemed to find expression, was Samuel J. May, mingling in his veins the best blood of the Sewalls and Quineys; a man so exceptionally pure and large-hearted, so genial, tender, and loving, that he could be faithful to truth and duty without making an enemy.

"The de'il wad look into his face,  
And swear he couldna wrang him."

That tall, gaunt, swarthy man, erect, eagle-faced, upon whose somewhat martial figure the Quaker coat seemed a little out of place, was Lindley Coates, known in all eastern Pennsylvania as a stern enemy of slavery; that slight, eager man, intensely alive in every feature and gesture, was Thomas Shipley, who for thirty years had been the protector of the free colored people of Philadelphia, and whose name was whispered reverently in the slave cabins of Maryland as the friend of the black man, — one of a class peculiar to old Quakerism, who in doing what they felt to be duty, and walking as the Light within guided them, knew no fear and shrank from no sacrifice. Braver men the world has not known. Beside him, differing in creed, but united with him in works of love and charity, sat Thomas Whitson of the Hicksite school of Friends, fresh from his farm in Lancaster County, dressed in plainest homespun, his tall form surmounted by a shock of unkempt hair, the odd obliquity of his vision contrasting strongly with the clearness and directness of his spiritual insight. Elizur Wright, the young professor of a Western college who had lost his place by his bold advocacy of freedom, with a look of sharp concentration in keeping with an intellect keen as a Damascus blade, closely watched the proceedings through his

spectacles, opening his mouth only to speak directly to the purpose. The portly form of Dr. Bartholomew Fessell, the beloved physician, from that beautiful land of plenty and peace, which Bayard Taylor has described in his *Story of Kennett*, was not to be overlooked. Abolitionist in heart and soul, his house was known as the shelter of runaway slaves, — and no sportsman ever entered into the chase with such zest as he did into the arduous and sometimes dangerous work of aiding their escape and baffling their pursuers. The youngest man present was, I believe, James Miller McKim, a Presbyterian minister from Columbia, afterwards one of our most efficient workers. James Mott, E. L. Capron, Arnold Buffum, and Nathan Winslow, men well known in the antislavery agitation, were conspicuous members. Vermont sent down from her mountains Orson S. Murray, a man terribly in earnest, with a zeal that bordered on fanaticism, and who was none the more genial for the mob-violence to which he had been subjected. In front of me, awakening pleasant associations of the old homestead in Merrimack valley, sat my first school-teacher, Joshua Coffin, the learned and worthy antiquarian and historian of Newbury. A few spectators, mostly of the Hicksite division of Friends, were present in broad brims and plain bonnets, among them Esther Moore and Lucretia Mott.

Committees were chosen to draft a Constitution for a National Antislavery Society, nominate a list of officers, and prepare a declaration of principles to be signed by the members. Dr. A. L. Cox of New York, while these committees were absent, read something from my pen eulogistic of William Lloyd Garrison; and Lewis Tappan and Amos A. Phelps, a Congregational clergyman of Boston, afterwards one of the most devoted laborers in the cause, followed in generous commendation of the zeal, courage, and devotion of the young pioneer. The president, after calling James McCrummell, one of the two or three colored members of the Conven-



tion, to the chair, made some eloquent remarks upon those editors who had ventured to advocate emancipation. At the close of his speech a young man rose to speak, whose appearance at once arrested my attention. I think I have never seen a finer face and figure, and his manner, words, and bearing were in keeping. "Who is he?" I asked of one of the Pennsylvania delegates. "Robert Purvis, of this city, a colored man;" was the answer. He began by uttering his heart-felt thanks to the delegates who had convened for the deliverance of his people. He spoke of Garrison in terms of warmest eulogy, as one who had stirred the heart of the nation, broken the tomb-like slumber of the church, and compelled it to listen to the story of the slave's wrongs. He closed by declaring that the friends of colored Americans would not be forgotten. "Their memories," he said, "will be cherished when pyramids and monuments shall have crumbled in dust. The flood of time which is sweeping away the refuge of lies, is bearing on the advocates of our cause to a glorious immortality."

The committee on the Constitution made their report, which after discussion was adopted. It disclaimed any right or intention of interfering, otherwise than by persuasion and Christian expostulation, with slavery as it existed in the States, but affirming the duty of Congress to abolish it in the District of Columbia and Territories, and to put an end to the domestic slave-trade. A list of officers of the new society was then chosen: Arthur Tappan of New York, President, and Elizer Wright, Jr., William Lloyd Garrison, and A. L. Cox, Secretaries. Among the Vice-Presidents was Dr. Lord of Dartmouth College, then professedly in favor of emancipation, but who afterwards turned a moral somersault, a self-inversion which left him ever after on his head instead of his feet. He became a querulous advocate of slavery as a divine institution, and denounced woe upon the abolitionists for interfering with the will and purpose of the Creator. As the cause

of freedom gained ground, the poor man's heart failed him, and his hope for church and state grew fainter and fainter. A sad prophet of the Evangel of Slavery, he testified in the unwilling ears of an unbelieving generation, and died at last despairing of a world which seemed determined that Canaan should no longer be cursed, nor Onesimus sent back to Philemon.

The committee on the Declaration of Principles, of which I was a member, held a long session discussing the proper scope and tenor of the document. But little progress being made, it was finally decided to entrust the matter to a sub-committee consisting of William L. Garrison, S. J. May, and myself; and after a brief consultation and comparison of each other's views, the drafting of the important paper was assigned to the former gentleman. We agreed to meet him at his lodgings in the house of a colored friend early the next morning. It was still dark when we climbed up to his room, and the lamp was still burning by the light of which he was writing the last sentence of the declaration. We read it carefully, made a few verbal changes, and submitted it to the large committee, who unanimously agreed to report it to the Convention.

The paper was read to the Convention by Dr. Atlee, chairman of the committee, and listened to with the profoundest interest.

Commencing with a reference to the time, fifty-seven years before, when, in the same city of Philadelphia, our fathers announced to the world their Declaration of Independence,—based on the self-evident truths of human equality and rights,—and appealed to arms for its defense, it spoke of the new enterprise as one "without which that of our fathers is incomplete," and as transcending theirs in magnitude, solemnity, and probable results, as much "as moral truth does physical force." It spoke of the difference of the two in the means and ends proposed, and of the trilling grievances of our fathers, compared with the wrongs and sufferings of the slaves, which it forcibly character-

ized as unequaled by any others on the face of the earth. It claimed that the nation was bound to repent at once, to let the oppressed go free, and to admit them to all the rights and privileges of others; because, it asserted, no man has a right to enslave or inbrute his brother; because liberty is inalienable; because there is no difference, *in principle*, between slaveholding and man-stealing, which the law brands as piracy; and because no length of bondage can invalidate man's claim to himself, or render slave laws anything but "an audacious usurpation."

It maintained that no compensation should be given to planters emancipating slaves, because that would be a surrender of fundamental principles; "slavery is a crime, and is, therefore, not an article to be sold;" because slave-holders are not just proprietors of what they claim; because emancipation would destroy only nominal, not real property; and because compensation, if given at all, should be given to the slaves.

It declared any "scheme of expatriation" to be "delusive, cruel, and dangerous." It fully recognized the right of each State to legislate exclusively on the subject of slavery within its limits, and conceded that Congress, under the present national compact, had no right to interfere; though still contending that it had the power, and should exercise it, "to suppress the domestic slave-trade between the several States," and "to abolish slavery in the District of Columbia and in those portions of our territory which the Constitution has placed under its exclusive jurisdiction."

After clearly and emphatically avowing the principles underlying the enterprise, and guarding with scrupulous care the rights of persons and States under the Constitution, in prosecuting it, the declaration closed with these eloquent words:—

"We also maintain that there are, at the present time, the highest obligations resting upon the people of the free States to remove slavery by moral and political action, as prescribed in the Constitution of the United States.

They are now living under a pledge of their tremendous physical force to fasten the galling fetters of tyranny upon the limbs of millions in the Southern States; they are liable to be called at any moment to suppress a general insurrection of the slaves; they authorize the slave-owner to vote on three fifths of his slaves as property, and thus enable him to perpetuate his oppression; they support a standing army at the South for its protection; and they seize the slave who has escaped into their territories, and send him back to be tortured by an enraged master or a brutal driver. This relation to slavery is criminal, and full of danger. *It must be broken up.*

"These are our views and principles,—these our designs and measures. With entire confidence in the overruling justice of God, we plant ourselves upon the Declaration of Independence and the truths of Divine revelation as upon the everlasting rock.

"We shall organize antislavery societies, if possible, in every city, town, and village in our land.

"We shall send forth agents to lift up the voice of remonstrance, of warning, of entreaty and rebuke.

"We shall circulate unsparingly and extensively antislavery tracts and periodicals.

"We shall enlist the pulpit and the press in the cause of the suffering and the dumb.

"We shall aim at a purification of the churches from all participation in the guilt of slavery.

"We shall encourage the labor of freemen over that of the slaves, by giving a preference to their productions; and

"We shall spare no exertions nor means to bring the whole nation to speedy repentance.

"Our trust for victory is solely in God. We may be personally defeated, but our principles never. TRUTH, JUSTICE, REASON, HUMANITY, must and will gloriously triumph. Already a host is coming up to the help of the Lord against the mighty, and the prospect before us is full of encouragement.



"Submitting this Declaration to the candid examination of the people of this country, and of the friends of liberty all over the world, we hereby affix our signatures to it;—pledging ourselves that, under the guidance and by the help of Almighty God, we will do all that in us lies, consistently with this declaration of our principles, to overthrow the most execrable system of slavery that has ever been witnessed upon earth—to deliver our land from its deadliest curse—to wipe out the foulest stain which rests upon our national escutcheon—and to secure to the colored population of the United States all the rights and privileges which belong to them as men and as Americans—come what may to our persons, our interests, or our reputations—whether we live to witness the triumph of JUSTICE, LIBERTY, and HUMANITY, or perish untimely as martyrs in this great, benevolent, and holy cause."

The reading of the paper was followed by a discussion which lasted several hours. A member of the Society of Friends moved its immediate adoption. "We have," he said, "all given it our assent: every heart here responds to it. It is a doctrine of Friends that these strong and deep impressions should be heeded." The Convention, nevertheless, deemed it important to go over the declaration carefully, paragraph by paragraph. During the discussion, one of the spectators asked leave to say a few words. A beautiful and graceful woman, in the prime of life, with a face beneath her plain cap as finely intellectual as that of Madame Roland, offered some wise and valuable suggestions, in a clear, sweet voice, the charm of which I have never forgotten. It was Lucretia Mott, of Philadelphia. The President courteously thanked her, and encouraged her to take a part in the discussion. On the morning of the last day of our session, the declaration, with its few verbal amendments, carefully engrossed on parchment, was brought before the Convention. Samuel J. May rose to read it for the last time. His sweet, persuasive voice faltered with the

intensity of his emotions as he repeated the solemn pledges of the concluding paragraphs. After a season of silence, David Thurston, of Maine, rose as his name was called by one of the secretaries, and affixed his name to the document. One after another passed up to the platform, signed, and retired in silence. All felt the deep responsibility of the occasion:—the shadow and forecast of a life-long struggle rested upon every countenance.

Our work as a Convention was now done. President Green arose to make the concluding address. The circumstances under which it was uttered may have lent it an impressiveness not its own; but as I now recall it, it seems to me the most powerful and eloquent speech to which I have ever listened. He passed in review the work that had been done, the constitution of the new society, the declaration of sentiments, and the union and earnestness which had marked the proceedings. His closing words will never be forgotten by those who heard them:—

"Brethren, it has been good to be here. In this hallowed atmosphere I have been revived and refreshed. This brief interview has more than repaid me for all that I have ever suffered. I have here met congenial minds; I have rejoiced in sympathies delightful to the soul. Heart has beat responsive to heart, and the holy work of seeking to benefit the outraged and despised has proved the most blessed employment.

"But now we must retire from these balmy influences and breathe another atmosphere. The chill hoar-frost will be upon us. The storm and tempest will rise, and the waves of persecution will dash against our souls. Let us be prepared for the worst. Let us fasten ourselves to the throne of God as with hooks of steel. If we cling not to Him, our names to that document will be but as dust.

"Let us court no applause; indulge in no spirit of vain boasting. Let us be assured that our only hope in grappling with the bony monster is in an Arm that is stronger than ours. Let us fix

our gaze on God, and walk in the light of his countenance. If our cause be just — and we know it is — his omnipotence is pledged to its triumph. Let this cause be entwined around the very fibres of our hearts. Let our hearts grow to it, so that nothing but death can sunder the bond."

He ceased, and then, amidst a silence broken only by the deep-drawn breath of emotion in the assembly, lifted up his voice in a prayer to Almighty God, full

of fervor and feeling, imploring his blessing and sanctification upon the Convention and its labors. And with the solemnity of this supplication in our hearts we clasped hands in farewell, and went forth each man to his place of duty, not knowing the things that should befall us, as individuals, but with a confidence, never shaken by abuse and persecution, in the certain triumph of our cause.

*John G. Whittier.*

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### WHEREFORE?

BLACK sea, black sky! A ponderous steamship driving  
Between them, laboring westward on her way,  
And in her path a trap of Death's contriving  
Waiting remorseless for its easy prey.

Hundreds of souls within her frame lie dreaming,  
Hoping and fearing, longing for the light:  
With human life and thought and feeling teeming  
She struggles onward through the awful night.

Upon her furnace fires fresh fuel flinging,  
The swarthy firemen grumble at the dust  
Mixed with the coal — when suddenly upspringing,  
Swift through the smoke-stack like a signal thrust,

Flares a red flame, a dread illumination!  
A cry, — a tumult! Slowly to her helm  
The vessel yields, 'mid shouts of acclamation,  
And joy and terror all her crew o'erwhelm;

For looming from the blackness drear before them  
Discovered is the iceberg — hardly seen,  
Its ghastly precipices hanging o'er them,  
Its reddened peaks, with dreadful chasms between,

Ere darkness swallows it again! and veering  
Out of its track the brave ship onward steers,  
Just grazing ruin. Trembling still, and fearing,  
Her grateful people melt in prayers and tears.

Is it a mockery, their profound thanksgiving?  
Another ship goes shuddering to her doom  
Unwarned, that very night, with hopes as living,  
With freight as precious, lost amid the gloom,



